



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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North Dakota Observes National Viral Hepatitis Testing Day

BISMARCK, N.D. – In observance of National Viral Hepatitis Testing Day on May 19, the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) is encouraging residents to know their hepatitis C status by getting tested for the disease.

Chronic hepatitis is a viral condition that affects the liver, and is the leading cause of liver cancer. Many people do not experience symptoms of hepatitis C and do not know that they are infected because symptoms can take up to 30 years to develop. When symptoms do appear, they often are a sign of advanced liver disease. Symptoms of hepatitis C can include fever, fatigue, vomiting, abdominal pain and jaundice.

Baby boomers – those born between 1945 and 1965 – should be tested for hepatitis C because their likelihood of being infected is five times greater than other segments of the population. Others who should be tested include current and past injection drug users, those who received donated blood or organs before 1992, those on hemodialysis and those born to a mother with hepatitis C. In North Dakota and across the U.S., there has been such a large increase in hepatitis C among injection drug users under 30 that it is considered an epidemic.

“Since May is Hepatitis Awareness Month and the May 19 is National Testing Day, we have a great opportunity to raise awareness about viral hepatitis, especially since as many as 75 percent of those infected with chronic hepatitis C do not know they are infected,” according to Sarah Weninger, STD/HCV Program Coordinator with the NDDoH. “Hepatitis C is the most common blood-borne infection in the United States and is the leading cause of liver cancer in the United States. As many as 70 percent to 80 percent of all people who have hepatitis C will develop long-term infections. However, once the infection is identified, treatment options are available, and the earlier the diagnosis, the better the treatment options.”

People who want to know their hepatitis C status can be tested without cost at many locations across North Dakota. A list of free testing sites is available at www.ndhealth.gov/Disease/Hepatitis/Information/GetTested.htm.

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Visit the health department home page at www.ndhealth.gov.

For more information, call the North Dakota Department of Health's Viral Hepatitis Program at 701.328.2378 or 800.472.2180 or visit www.ndhealth.gov/disease/hepatitis.

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